



RESEARCH OVERVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Higher education in TAFE

MONOGRAPH SERIES 01/2009

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A project funded through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation program investigated higher education programs—mostly bachelor's and associate degrees—offered by TAFE institutes. This overview highlights some of the implications for public policy identified through this project.

Findings relevant to public policy

TAFE has an important role as an alternative public provider of higher education.

TAFE institutions can play a key role in meeting the Australian Government's qualifications and equity targets. However, in using the TAFE sector to help realise these goals, it is important that TAFE's role as a public provider of higher education be maintained by allocating more Commonwealth-supported places and, in time, by its participation in the government's student-demand-driven funding system, the method the Commonwealth intends to use to fund public undergraduate provision in universities (*Main report*, pp. 11, 28, 37).

The development of a coherent tertiary education policy will support the growth of this alternative.

Higher education in TAFE needs to be supported by coherent tertiary education policies to guarantee the quality of provision and to ensure that it meets its intended outcomes. These policies include consideration of the governance, policy, funding, quality assurance, curriculum and the industrial frameworks required to support higher education teaching and academic standards. Policies are also required to support TAFE institutes to develop economies of scale and the expertise and culture they need to sustain higher education provision (*Main report* p. 10).

The establishment of a single industrial award will support tertiary education teachers in mixed-sector institutions.

A single award is needed to: ensure more equitable teaching loads for higher education teaching; establish career paths for TAFE teachers; give institutions more flexibility in recruiting, developing and allocating staff; reduce pressures to entrench sectoral distinctions between staff; and reduce tensions between the sectors. The development of a single award is an issue for

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governments, institutions and the two unions that separately cover TAFE and higher education teachers (*Main report*, p.38).

TAFE's capacity for higher education needs to be developed.

Many higher education teachers in TAFE lack access to the resources available in universities, for example, higher education curriculum committees, discipline forums, staff development programs and support from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. There are some helpful examples in England and these include funding for the development of higher education learning partnerships and the HE in FE Enhancement Programme, delivered through the United Kingdom's Higher Education Academy. It may also be useful to consider funding other partnerships to enable the development of communities of practice to support TAFE's provision of higher education, an overseas example being the University of Plymouth's partnership with its regional further education colleges in England (*Main report*, pp. 14, 38, *Literature review*, p. 18).

Economies of scale for higher education in TAFE should be investigated.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England is actively supporting the development of economies of scale in the provision of higher education in further education colleges.

Similar considerations might apply to Australia. The quality of higher education in TAFE will be scrutinised (with some justification) if the level of provision remains marginal. It may be worth considering an optimal sectoral mix of provision within mixed-sector TAFE institutes. Here TAFE institutes that offer close to the 20% threshold of higher education provision will qualify as dual-sector institutions and therefore be in a position to develop and invest in the resources needed to ensure the quality of that provision (*Main report*, p.38).

About the project

The project examined the growth and the implications of higher education offered by TAFE institutes. It sought to understand the purposes of such programs, how they have been developed and implemented, the impact they are having on institutional partnerships, how they are perceived by participants, and whether they create opportunities for students.

The project involved a survey of bachelor degrees offered by TAFE's equivalents in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also reviewed the literature on higher education in TAFE's equivalents in those countries. In addition, the project team conducted 98 interviews in six states and territories.

Further information

More information is available from the various publications associated with the project:

- the **research overviews**, which discuss the implications of the research for TAFE teachers, TAFE managers, staff development and public policy, as well as the issues raised about the status of TAFE degrees, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2189.html>>
- the **discussion paper**, *Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper* by Gavin Moodie, Leesa Wheelahan, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2139.html>>
- the **main report**, *Higher education in TAFE* by Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>
- the **literature review**, by Leesa Wheelahan, *Higher education in TAFE: Support document*, NCVER, Adelaide, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>

Additional information is available from:

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This overview is based on the research report, *Higher education in TAFE* by Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly. Visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html> for more information.